

Lawmakers Ask FAA To Explain Job Move

By Joseph Ryan

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Area federal lawmakers are calling into question the Federal Aviation Administration's decision to move 100 engineers from Des Plaines to Texas just as the massive O'Hare International Airport expansion gets off the ground.

The union representing those employees says the move, part of a nationwide staff consolidation, likely will push back the 2013 deadline for the \$7.5 billion expansion that is aimed at reducing delays and increasing capacity.

On Friday, federal lawmakers stepped up the pressure with a letter to FAA Administrator Marion Blakey.

"We believe this relocation could seriously impair air traffic control and safety operations in and around Chicago," the letter reads. "The decision . raises serious questions about the FAA's commitment to the success of the modernization process at O'Hare."

U.S. representatives Melissa Bean, a Barrington Democrat, Jan Schakowsky, an Evanston Democrat, Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican and U.S. Democratic senators Barack Obama and Dick Durbin signed the letter.

The lawmakers are asking for more information on why the move is being made and how it will affect workers and the expansion project.

"When we receive the letter we will be happy to respond to them and explain," FAA spokesman Greg Martin said.

The FAA contends none of the 100 jobs in the 650-position office will be directly related to air safety or the O'Hare expansion. All of the positions are outside of air traffic control, such as radar readers, but they are represented by the same union.

Yet, Air Traffic Controllers Association leaders say engineers working on the O'Hare expansion will be asked to move across the country, and it expects at least 50 will quit instead.

The relocation plan, which will affect hundreds of similar FAA employees across the country, is aimed at consolidating most operations into offices in Atlanta, Seattle and Fort Worth, Texas.

The current set up with nine regional offices is inefficient, Martin says. Over the next 10 years, the FAA estimates a savings of \$360 million.